

# Afghanistan Medal (1878-80)

## Second Afghan War

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**T**he political and military struggle over the buffer state of Afghanistan between the Imperial Russian Bear and the British Lion has come to be known as 'the Great Game'. Relations between the two empires had already been strained during Russia's war with Turkey in 1877, when Russian troops had advanced on Constantinople. The British reaction was to send Indian troops to Malta and a Royal Naval fleet to the Dardanelles to protect British interests. The crises passed after the Congress of Berlin in 1878 but then a Russian mission, under General Stolietov, was installed in Kabul with the intention of gaining influence over the Amir, Sher Ali.

The British had suffered a great loss of face with a refusal of their mission to even enter Afghanistan from British India. The Indian Governor-General, Lord Lytton, demanded that Sher Ali should receive the British mission in Kabul. The request was ignored and on this pretext the Second Afghan War began on 21st November 1878. The Amir, now fearing the British advance, left his country to seek help from the Tzar. Before his departure he appointed his son, Yaqub Khan, as regent. The Russians soon sent Sher Ali back to Afghanistan where he died in the northern town of Mazar-e Sharif in February 1879.

### **Clasp: Ali Masjid (21st November 1878)**

Sir Sam Browne's Peshawar Valley Field Forces' first task was to tackle the fortress of Ali Masjid and the adjoining fortifications 500 feet above the Khyber Pass. Browne sent one of his three brigades north of the Pass to come up behind the Afghans. The second brigade climbed the hills on the enemy's left, while the third attacked from the front. The Afghans soon realised that the British were about to storm their positions so they retreated further back into the Pass, only to be met by a British brigade. Many Afghans surrendered and were made prisoners of war as they had been out flanked on all sides. Browne's force continued its advance to Jalalabad.

### **Clasp: Peiwar Kotal (2nd December 1878)**

Peiwar Kotal was captured by General Roberts' column. Eight Afghan regiments fled their fortified positions leaving 18 guns; a great achievement for Roberts and his numerically smaller force.

### **Clasps: Charasia (6th October 1879) & Kabul (10th-23rd December 1879)**

General Stewart's column of 12,000 men had advanced from Quetta towards Kandahar via the Bolan Pass; Roberts with 6,000 men had entered the Kurram Valley, which was now under British occupation; Browne had moved west from Peshawar into the Khyber Pass and on to Jalalabad where he remained until the termination of the campaign with the Treaty of Gandamak in May 1879.

The British/Indian armies were now well established in Afghanistan.

By the terms of the Treaty of Gandamak, the Kurram Valley, the Khyber Pass and Afghan foreign policy would now all be under British control. The new Amir also agreed to an official British Residency in Kabul. Major Sir Louis Cavagnari was installed as the British Government's representative at Kabul. With a small escort of 75 men under Lieutenant Hamilton VC, Cavagnari entered Kabul on 24th July.

In September an incident occurred whereby unpaid Afghan troops, in a search of loot, mounted an armed attack on the British Residency. Cavagnari's plea for help from the Amir was ignored. Hamilton and his valiant soldiers were overwhelmed by the unruly mobs of Afghans resulting in all the occupants of the Residency being killed. Roberts and the Kurram column were sent to regain order. Ten miles from Kabul, Roberts encountered a large Afghan force at Charasia. With only 4,000 men and 18 guns Roberts attacked the enemy from the heights, and with the Afghans sustaining heavy losses, the enemy gave way. Roberts' victorious troops entered Kabul in mid-October.

### **Clasp: Ahmed Kel (19th April 1880)**

After Roberts' victory at Charasia and entry into Kabul with the Amir, Yakub Khan, the British occupied the city for the time being. The double-dealing Amir soon abdicated and so a pro British successor had to be found. Following a short interlude of peace in the region, the Afghans, realising the overall weakness of the British garrison, rose up again in December. As the enemy converged on the city the British retreated to the fortified camp of Sherpur to the north of Kabul. Roberts and his force were under siege by 100,000 Afghans, but the enemy suffered alarming losses from the British artillery and Martini Henry rifles. Roberts then returned to occupy the city and re-establish communications, (telegraph), back to India. The Kabul garrison was to be reinforced with 7,000 troops under Stewart from Kandahar. Stewart mounted a two column advance, via Khelat-i-Ghilzai and Ghazni. South of Ghazni, Stewart's column was attacked at Ahmed Kel as was a detachment of Roberts' troops sent out to escort Stewart into Kabul. Again the Afghans were defeated and the two forces were able to unite at the end of May.

### **Clasp: Kandahar (1st September 1880)**

Abdur Rahman, nephew of Sher Ali, in agreement with the British authorities, became the next Amir. The new Governor-General of India, Lord Ripon and London, wanted a withdrawal from Afghanistan as soon as possible. Just as the British were preparing to leave Kabul there was disastrous news; a brigade of the Bombay division had been annihilated at the Battle Maiwand by rebels loyal to Ayub Khan of Herat, a brother of Yakub Khan. The few survivors of the battle were under siege in Kandahar with the garrison. Stewart instantly made the decision to rescue the besieged troops. Stewart sent Roberts with 10,000 men. This force travelled 300 miles in three weeks coping with the incredibly high temperatures during the day and the freezing cold at night. A second column moved up from Quetta. Roberts reached the beleaguered garrison on 1st September 1880. The British soon forced the enemy from the hills to the west of the city. This action saw an end to the Second Afghan War. By the end of October Abdur Rahman was inaugurated as a pro British ruler of the country. The last British/Indian troops left Afghanistan in April 1881.

Description: Obverse – Veiled head in profile of Queen Victoria with the words, ‘Victoria Regina et Imperatrix’ around the circumference.

Reverse – British troops on the march with native cavalry and a striking depiction of an elephant carrying a mountain-gun. A mounted officer is shown in the foreground. At the bottom are the dates; ‘1878-79-80’. Around the top circumference is the word, ‘Afghanistan’.

**Clasps:** 6

**Metal:** Silver.

**Ribbon:** Dark green central stripe with broad crimson edges. (The crimson is said to represent the heraldic colour of Great Britain, the green edges, the sacred colour of the Prophet, Mohammed).

### **Valuation:**

	British Forces	Indian Units
Medals without a clasp	£225-£275	£165-£180
With ‘ALI MUSJID’ clasp	£300-£325	£225-£265
With ‘CHARASIA’ clasp	£300-£325	£225-£260
With ‘PEIWAR KOTAL’ clasp	£300-£325	£225-£265
With ‘KABUL’ clasp	£285-£325	£220-£260
With ‘AHMED KHEL’ clasp	£300-£325	£220-£260
With ‘KANDAHAR’ clasp	£300-£315	£220-£265
Medals with two clasps	£425-485	£300-£375
Medals with three clasps	£485-£575	£385-£485
Medals with four clasps	£775-£1,000	£500-£575



The Afghanistan Medal 1878-80

# Kabul to Kandahar Star (1880)

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**T**his medal was awarded to all British and Indian troops that took part in the gruelling 300 mile march from Kabul to Kandahar from 3rd-31st August 1880 to relieve the besieged General Burrows and his men after the disastrous Battle of Maiwand. At Maiwand on 27th July 1880, General Burrows with only 2,566 men, confronted 15-20,000 Afghans with 30 guns.

Burrows had little idea that there was such a large enemy army in and around the village of Maiwand. Most of the British and Indian units rallied to the attack. After a few hours of fighting almost 1,000 of Burrows' men lay dead. The remnants of his shattered force set off for Kandahar 45 miles away. Throughout the trek the British were harassed by Afghan snipers. After Roberts' epic march to relieve the beleaguered troops at Kandahar, Ayub Khan's army was defeated and scattered. As with Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift in the Zulu Wars, so the focus was shifted from the disaster (Maiwand), to the glorious victory of Kandahar although a small number of VCs were awarded for Maiwand.

Roberts, known affectionately as 'Bobs' by the men that served under him, became a national hero. He was granted a baronetcy and was made Commander-in-Chief of the British/Indian Army in 1885. Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar later rode with Kitchener and Wolesley in Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee celebrations in 1897. It is interesting to note that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character, Dr John H. Watson was wounded at Maiwand.

**Description:** Obverse – A 'rayed' five pointed star with four round objects (cannon balls) surmounted by the Royal Crown. In the centre of the medal is Victoria's 'VRI' monogram. Around the Royal cypher are the words, 'Kabul to Kandahar 1880'.  
Reverse – Plain with recipients name.

**Metal:** Bronze, made from the captured guns of Ayub Khan.

**Ribbon:** Watered silk – red, white, yellow, white and blue.

## **Valuation:**

Unnamed	£125-£165
Named (British units)	£325-£365
Named (Indian units)	£220-£265





The Kabul to Khandahar Star